

**Remarks by
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Conference sponsors and distinguished attendees at this conference, thank you for the opportunity to address the most significant issue facing Virginia in my fifty year career—the movement of people and goods within and through Virginia.

In recent weeks, we have learned much about storms from Category 1 to Category 5. It is abundantly clear that neglect of levees and other infrastructure in the New Orleans area caused awesome and unacceptable loss of life and damage to property, destroying the vitality of the Gulf Coast states.

We, in Virginia, are experiencing the initial impact of a Category 5 or greater storm. The impact is insidious and will not result in the TV drama of hundreds of lives lost and thousands of homes flooded and washed away in several days. But the erosion of support for transportation and infrastructure is already resulting in economic loss of serious proportions and the destruction of the quality of life of our citizens. The adverse effect on Virginia and the entire Atlantic region will continue to grow dramatically with major adverse impact on future generations of Virginians.

Nearly fifty years ago, I was employed by a law firm representing the Virginia Highway Department. My assignment as a young lawyer was to acquire right-of-way for the Capitol Beltway. Reception of the Beltway project by local government and citizens was enthusiastic and in keeping with the vision of the Washington region as outlined in the Metropolitan Council of Government’s plans for transportation published in the early 50s. The plan correctly forecast the region’s growth and provided for three beltways—one built and two trashed by populist-driven politicians. In the mid-50s, the Virginia Highway Department was visionary and bold—driven by a “can do” attitude in solving transportation requirements. Political leadership and the Virginia Highway Department recognized that Virginia was a growing population with a prosperous future depending upon transportation and access.

Interstate 66 inside the Beltway first appeared on local plans in 1938. Unfortunately, in 1966 to provide for right-of-way for metro rail, the highway department deferred construction of I-66 within the Beltway. Passage of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) in 1969 empowered every Tom, Dick and Harry to challenge every highway project. By 1974, the I-66 brouhaha was in full force with Arlington citizen groups raising every conceivable environmental and land use argument to halt construction of I-66. The result is well known—at many times the initial cost estimate, half of the project was constructed. Citizens then argued that no Arlingtonian would use the evil highway. Today, Arlington residents daily cause gridlock on both westbound lanes traveling to jobs in outer Northern Virginia suburbs. The Rosslyn-Ballston corridor’s success would have been impossible without the accessibility I-66 provides.

With a few notable exceptions since the 70s, the history of road building and transportation in Virginia has been dysfunctional. Exceptions include the efforts of Governor Baliles to raise additional funds, as well as private sector-led efforts to widen I-66 to Manassas, build the Fairfax County Parkway, Route 28 and the Dulles Greenway; the current construction of the Wilson Bridge and related Beltway interchanges, and most recently the valiant and productive effort of Philip Shucet to restore professional business practices within the Department.

Originally, the antis were primarily neighborhood and environmental groups. In recent years, the environmental sector (now augmented by national environmental groups) on the left has been joined by the anti-tax far right with the result that well-funded populism now dictates highway planning to the detriment of action required for the free movement of people and goods and the accommodation of a spectacular but fully predictable growth of population and resulting prosperity that has occurred in the last two decades and will continue to occur for the foreseeable future. Politicians clamor for more jobs but ignore the transportation improvements required to service prosperity.

Transportation planning in Virginia in the words of Senator Russ Potts is characterized by the 3 Ds—Denial, Delusion and Deceit. Despite overwhelming evidence of need, political will is lacking to address even the most basic projects. The rail lobby presents an option alleged to solve transportation problems without road construction. The rail lobby presents the promise of solutions without cost projections and without mentioning sources of capital and the enormous operating subsidies required. The public is deceived to believe that highways cannot be constructed without “paving over” major regions.

The recent annual report of the Metropolitan Council of Governments titled “Facing Up To The Transportation Challenge” should be more correctly titled, “Turning Our Backs on the Transportation Challenge.” It reports on a five year, multi-million dollar study, which rather than addressing the world as it is and transportation solutions that people will actually use, has focused on land use scenarios that are totally impractical and delusory transit solutions that, even if constructed, address barely a fraction of actual need.

No one disputes the need for intelligent land use decisions, but absent construction of well-planned transportation grids to provide the structure around which land use can be focused and managed, higher densities simply generate higher congestion.

The only significant progress in the Washington region in the past decade has been driven by Governor Ehrlich in Maryland. Against the violent and often vicious opposition of the antis, Maryland soon will commence construction of the Inter County Connector—an eighteen mile stretch of road from I-270 to I-95 desperately needed to relieve existing congestion. Under the previous administration the Intercounty Connector’s right-of-way was on the auction block. Today, the ICC is Maryland’s #1 transportation priority. The difference is simply the political will to do what 40 years of studies and plans (now re-enforced by total gridlock much of the day) had confirmed needed to be done.

What does the future hold and what can the private sector be expected to do to assist? There is much that can be done but to progress, credibility must be restored and leadership must begin in the Executive Mansion with the Governor of Virginia.

VDOT must become a 21st century agency. The goal must be the effective movement of people and goods not placating antis on the left and right. VDOT must be staffed and given the political backing to not only plan effectively, but to advocate: To examine short and long-term critical needs; to resume its historical leadership role in statewide and regional planning; to identify and protect corridors of statewide and regional significance; and to prioritize based on performance criteria to recognize projects that move the most people in the most time and cost-efficient means. For example, going for populist and politically driven rail and hot lane proposals is not the answer unless there is a plan of which rail and hot lanes are a part. Certainly, environmental impacts must be mitigated and there's every reason to believe we're smart enough to do just that.

Recognizing that a Category 5 storm is in progress, we must be smart enough to recognize that millions of new Virginians – our children and grand children – are on the way and that they need a transportation system to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

We all know the long list of requirements: The Western Corridor, additional Potomac River bridges, a Rappahannock bridge, improvement of I-81, bridges and tunnels in Tidewater, 460 in central Virginia, and 58 in Southside. We all know that numerous financial studies have identified needs for new money—real new money not clever manipulation of other state funds to give the impression of “new money”—for highways in excess of \$2 billion a year for the foreseeable future and a cumulative requirement in the range of \$75 to \$100 billion in the coming several decades.

To achieve these and other fundamental objectives we must stop making lists of reasons why things can't be done and start focusing on what it's going to take to do what needs to be done.

Better transportation for a better Virginia requires Leadership reside in the Governor as the chief executive of the State. It is the Governor's role to lead, set the tone, encourage, and demonstrate need and willpower. This year only one candidate – Senator Potts has demonstrated he understands this important role and has outlined a workable plan of great merit.

The private sector's ability to make a difference is directly dependent upon the Governor's willingness and the Department's ability to lead and champion the right solutions for the right reasons. For years, the private sector's greatest frustration and impediment has been the Commonwealth's leadership failure to fulfill its fundamental responsibility to champion transportation needs. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the private sector to play a major role as long as the Commonwealth takes a posture of neutrality, benign neglect or support for the politically correct as opposed to the practical and prudent.

Virginia's transportation future requires that reality be the guide. Political will must be demanded by our citizens. The three Ds—Denial, Delusion, and Deceit—must no longer

characterize Virginia's transportation effort. In that regard, a ray of hope is a recent poll by the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance that not surprisingly finds citizens are overwhelmingly in support of practical solutions to transportation such as bridges, the Western Corridor, and other major projects. Politicians in recent years have adopted the position that transportation solutions are simply beyond the ability of man to address—they shrug their collective shoulders and ignore needs. To divert attention, it is alleged the public will not support significant highways. Thus, the antis allege there must be more emphasis on pedestrian paths, bicycle trails, high rises at Metro stations, etc. The survey suggests precisely the opposite. Two-thirds of Northern Virginians believe transportation to be the most important problem facing the region while only 10% believe the next highest issue—growth—was the problem. Nearly 70% of area residents support construction of new river bridges and construction of a western transportation corridor connecting I-95 in Stafford County to I-270 in Maryland. Seventy percent of area residents support the expansion of I-66 inside the Beltway. This overwhelming support for major improvements belies current conventional political dogma that Northern Virginians will not support significant highway solutions.

No politician could be elected saying we can not build the schools our children need. Yet we continue to elect those who say we can't build the roads our children will need. It is up to you ladies and gentlemen as those interested in transportation and the future of Virginia to demand solutions. It is particularly incumbent upon those here from the private sector who know what is needed to become part of the solution, not simply by applying for state contracts and taking state tax dollars, but by educating public officials and becoming advocates for sound transportation policies at the local and state level. Invitations to the Mansion must not be the priority.

If you're not engaged in demanding solutions, you are part of the problem.